DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 404 607 CG 027 578

AUTHOR Berson, Judith S.
TITLE Student Perceptions of the Intercollegiate Athletic Program at a Community College.
PUB DATE Feb 96
NOTE 29p.; Paper presented at the Annual Convention of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (78th, Atlanta, GA, March 13-16, 1996).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Academic Achievement; Academic Persistence; *Athletes; *College Athletics; College Students; Community Colleges; *Extracurricular Activities; *Intercollegiate Cooperation; Opinions; School Effectiveness; Student Attitudes; Student Development; Two Year Colleges
IDENTIFIERS Broward Community College FL; *Student Athletes

ABSTRACT

The importance of co-curricular experiences is leading to an increased scrutiny of student development functions. This ethnographic-interview study examines the effect of participation in intercollegiate athletics on students' academic success. The setting for the research was a large community college. Fourteen current and two former student athletes on a women's softball team, along with their coach, were interviewed. Respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth answers. During initial interviews the subjects mentioned a variety of factors that they attributed to their academic success. Patterns began to emerge and these themes were further explored in one-on-one interviews. Interviewees expressed a high level of commitment and enthusiasm for their sport, their teammates, and the athletic program. Current players attributed their continuation in college to their membership on the team and named such factors as full-time attendance requirements as being partly responsible for their persistence. Although no one overriding factor influenced the academic success of the student athletes, the study confirmed retention literature which argues that the stronger the relationship between the student and the institution, the greater the likelihood of course completion. Contains 24 references. (RJM)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED 404 607

# STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC PROGRAM AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

BY

JUDITH S. BERSON

BROWARD COMMUNITY COLLEGE
FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA

CG027578

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

J. S Berson

2 TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC).

## ♦TABLE OF CONTENTS♦


| | Page |
|---|---|
| Abstract | 1 |
| Introduction | 2 |
| Setting | 4 |
| Methodology | 15 |
| Participants | 17 |
| Data Collection and Analysis of Findings | 17 |
| Table 1. Selected Academic Success Factors | 19 |
| Discussion | 20 |
| General Impressions | 21 |
| Summary | 22 |
| References | 24 |
| Appendix | |
| Student Interview Guide | 26 |


February 1996

# STUDENT PERCEPTIONS OF THE INTERCOLLEGIATE ATHLETIC PROGRAM AT A COMMUNITY COLLEGE

BY

JUDITH S. BERSON

Abstract

This is an ethnographic interview study that examines the effect of participation in intercollegiate athletics at Broward Community College on student academic success. Based on interviews with 14 current and two former student athletes from the women's softball team and their coach, the researcher describes student perceptions of various support services and activities in terms of academic success. The students' perceptions are consistent with the value of on-campus group membership in the retention literature but with particular attention to the value of block scheduling of classes not previously emphasized.

## INTRODUCTION

> *"Which way do I go?" said Alice. "That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat. "I don't care where," said Alice. "Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat. "So long as I get somewhere," Alice added as an explanation.---*
>
> Lewis Carroll in *Alice in Wonderland*

It is common, especially in the field of education, that what gets measured tends to get done. During the 1980s and 1990s, measuring outcomes has taken on increased importance in this country. Today there is little doubt about the value of program evaluation, especially in relation to education in general. Institutions of higher education, in particular, must continually prove their effectiveness to state and local governing boards, regional accrediting agencies, professional associations as well as their primary *customers,* students. This current trend that focuses on results is referred to as results-based, competency-based, and outcome-based education (Johnson & Whitfield, 1991).

Although in the past most attention was focused on academic achievement, the importance of co-curricular experiences has been established and student development functions are now receiving similar scrutiny. There

has been a proliferation of studies, books and journal articles on the why, how, who, and when of conducting evaluations to assess whether programs are meeting their stated goals and objectives. With this intense focus on assessment and measurement, there is no shortage of measurement theories, e.g. entry level testing, focus groups, student satisfaction surveys, grades, retention records, longitudinal tracking, alumni surveys. The Council for the Advancement of Standards developed guidelines defining acceptable practice in a number of student affairs areas (CAS Standards, 1986).

Astin (1991) is recognized for his landmark work in assessing student outcomes and persistence. He has shown that involvement in co-curricular activities on campus leads to an increase in retention. Naretto (1993) also found that successful students had found "a niche of support" on their campuses. The value of improving retention is to keep students at the college "long enough to realize their education or occupational goals" (Beatty-Guenter, 1994). In addition to improving persistence, Astin's research shows that students learn by becoming involved. Therefore, today's college administrators are seeking ways to improve student learning by creating supportive campus environments.

According to sociologist Vincent Tinto (1995), the three areas of activity that are most positively related to academic success are "student contact with faculty and peers, student classroom experience, and student learning behaviors." He observed that an individual's experiences in college are more important than the skills, attitudes, and beliefs they bring with them.

College and university intercollegiate athletic programs throughout the nation have received a great deal of attention, not all favorable. Often rules are violated and athletes are exploited at the expense of their academic studies. In 1992, Broward Community College (BCC) implemented *The Athletic Plan for Excellence*, designed to lead the College to prominence and excellence in the classroom and on the playing field (Young, 1990).

There are various positive outcomes of a college education such as academic achievement, improved character, attainment of ethical values, and the development of leadership skills. Many factors are known to contribute to student success, e.g. maturity, motivation, family support. A problem in focusing research on student academic success is in isolating the role played by membership in a particular group such as a sports team. Research is needed to examine the perceptions of student athletes as to the benefits of intercollegiate team membership on their academic success.

## SETTING

Broward Community College has been serving the educational needs of Broward County's citizens since 1960. Over 30,000 students per year enroll in university transfer and vocational programs at three campuses, two outreach centers, and a Downtown Fort Lauderdale Center. The College has a non-traditional student population and is composed of a mix of adults and students from many different cultures and nationalities.

The College is one of 28 two-year public community colleges operating under the Florida Division of Community Colleges. The College is accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) and is an Equal Access/Equal Opportunity institution. As such, BCC adheres to all applicable Federal and State laws including Title IV, Title IX, Students' Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990. The local governing board consists of a five member District Board of Trustees, each appointed by the Governor for five-year terms. The members of the Board are political appointments based on the party of the governor holding office at the time a vacancy occurs.

The main campuses are strategically located, each within a few miles of the Florida Turnpike, and approximately ten minutes from each other by car. Central Campus is located in Davie on an educational complex that includes Florida International University (FIU) and Florida Atlantic University (FAU), adjacent to the campuses of Nova Southeastern University, a high school, and a vocational technical school. North Campus is located in Pompano and South Campus is located in Hollywood/Pembroke Pines.

A Downtown Center and centralized administrative offices are located in Fort Lauderdale in a a shared-use facility which houses BCC, FIU, and FAU. The College President, Vice Presidents of Academic Affairs, Student Affairs, Human and Financial Resources, Development, and Facilities, along with their respective departments are located at the Downtown Center. In addition to the College Board of Trustees and the President's staff of college-wide Vice Presidents, each

campus is administered by a management team headed by a Campus Provost. The Provosts report directly to the President.

The College operates under a comprehensive mission statement which includes "to provide student development and academic support services" as one of its key roles as an institution of higher education. The Vice President of Student Affairs has specific responsibility for this section of the mission statement.

This responsibility includes the following college-wide functions: Student Life, Student Financial Services, Intercollegiate Athletics, Academic Intervention, Disability Services, Academic Advisement, Counseling, Enrollment Management, and Student Community Service. Each area is administered by a program director, dean, or coordinator. Due to budgetary limitations, the Vice President for Student Affairs currently serves as the College-wide Athletic Director. Each campus has an Assistant Athletic Director/Campus Athletic Director who reports to the Campus Provost for all supervisory and operational concerns and to the Vice President for all policy and program evaluation concerns.

The Intercollegiate Athletic Program is considered an integral part of the educational program of the college. Its objective is to provide student athletes with opportunities to develop lifelong academic and interpersonal skills through use of a wide array of special student services. The program operates under its own set of guidelines within the policies and regulations of the Florida

Community College Activities Association (FCCAA), the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), and in adherence with Title IX of the Higher Education Act of 1974. The funding for the intercollegiate athletic programs is provided through a student activities fee which is paid by all students on a per-credit basis. The use of these funds is recommended by a Student Activities Board (SAB), which is comprised of students, faculty and staff.

College and university intercollegiate athletic programs throughout the nation have received a great deal of attention, not all favorable, due to direct rules violations and the exploitation of athletes at the expense of their academic studies. In an attempt to reduce such rules violations and exploitation, the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) passed Proposition 48 in 1986, a strict set of academic admission standards for athletes. The controversial standards did, in fact, raise the graduation rates of student athletes, however opponents of the rule feel the higher standards only served to exclude academically unprepared athletes from potential careers in big-time sports (Blum, 1993).

In 1990, the Division of Student Affairs began developing an athletic plan for excellence, designed to achieve a quality intercollegiate sports program at Broward Community College (Young, 1990). The plan was the result of extensive consultations with faculty, administrators, athletic staff, coaches, student affairs professionals throughout the state and country, and others. The plan was not approved or implemented until 1992.

The intention of the plan was to invest funding, appropriate staff support, and other resources into the intercollegiate athletic program to lead BCC to prominence and excellence in the classroom and on the playing field. An integral component of the "athletic game plan," as it is often called, is a systematic evaluation of the Intercollegiate Athletic Program as part of a comprehensive institutional effectiveness process involving ongoing planning, goal setting, review, resource allocation, and progress assessment.

The academic progress of student athletes is analyzed and evaluated on an annual basis by the BCC Office of Institutional Research. *Academic Performance of Student Athletes at BCC: An Initial Cohort Study* (Wright & Galbato, 1992) compares the academic performance of student athletes with that of non-athletes. The November 1992 report showed that student athletes performed *better* than non-athletes overall. In addition, after two years, a higher number of athletes (20.2%) tend to graduate than non-athletes (5.6%). The study concluded that "BCC's student athletes are not participating in college-level sports at the expense of their educational programs" (Wright & Galbato, 1992).

A subsequent report was prepared by the Office of Institutional Research in February 1993 comparing success rates and persistence rates of student athletes and non-athletes during Fall Term of 1990. The results indicated that graduation rates were higher for all athlete groups, whereas the still enrolled and persistence rates were lower than all students (Galbato, 1993).

The Division of Community Colleges receives recommendations from the Council of Presidents, composed of the 28 community college presidents. A Council of Student Affairs (CSA), which operates under the Council of Presidents, includes approximately 100 chief student affairs officers and deans of the various Florida community college campuses. In 1992, the CSA undertook the task of developing a uniform set of accountability standards that could be implemented to some extent at each of the member institutions (Accountability Standards, 1994).

The standards are based on the 1992-93 *Criteria for Accreditation* of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools and the 1986 *Standards and Guidelines for Student Services/Development Programs* of the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) (1986). Each standard includes sample outcome measures to assist college student personnel officers in designing their individual evaluation systems. Members of the CSA approved 15 standards in 1993, they were presented to the Council of Presidents at their June meeting, and the institutions committed to implementing them on their individual campuses with technical assistance from the CSA.

A reflection of the importance placed on intercollegiate athletic programs by the accrediting agencies is the fact that three of the 15 state standards (20 percent) pertain to intercollegiate athletics. These three standard statements are listed below. The outcome measures developed for each of the standards serve as the foundation for the evaluation of the BCC Intercollegiate Athletic Program.

*XII. The college must operate an intercollegiate athletics program in strict adherence to written and published goals and objectives which have been developed by the administration in consultation with athletic staff with input from faculty.*

*XIII. The college must control the athletic program, and contribute to its direction with appropriate participation by faculty and students, and oversight by the governing board.*

*XIV. Institutions must establish and publish policies pertaining to recruiting, admission, financial aid and continuing eligibility of athletes and must monitor compliance with these policies.*

The Broward Community College catalog states that the purpose of the Intercollegiate Athletic Program is to "maintain a comprehensive, well-balanced program under the policies and regulations of the Florida Community College Activities Association and the National Junior College Athletic Association." The importance of the intercollegiate athletic program to the College is demonstrated by a significant commitment of funds, personnel, and facilities.

In *A Strategic Plan for Broward Community College Student Development into the 1990's*, the authors noted the important role played by the College's athletic and physical education programs in local community public relations. The report stated, "Our athletic program is responsible for getting many students interested in college and particularly our institution, who might not have been

interested otherwise. Once enrolled, this department provides a support system for these students which aids in their retention" (Sloan & Raymond, 1987).

Players are recruited from Broward, as well as Dade and Palm Beach counties. Although out-of-state and out-of country students are not actively recruited by the coaches, there are several non-Florida residents on the various teams. All athletes must meet the regular college admission and financial aid requirements. Athletes do not receive any special consideration or priority status with regard to their academic standing. In addition, in order to maintain their eligibility to play, athletes must maintain a 2.0 grade point average (GPA) and enrolled full-time (minimum 12 credits) throughout the term.

In addition to the value placed on institutional effectiveness by BCC's College President, compliance with SACS accreditation standards is an essential component in driving the need to evaluate programs at the College. SACS is specific in its requirement of periodic evaluation, as well as the content and use of the outcomes of the evaluation.

Provisions of the Student Right to Know and Campus Security Act of 1990 require colleges and universities to make available information regarding student athletes receiving financial aid based on their participation in athletics, and academic performance of all students. BCC is thus required to compare the success rates and persistence rates of students who participate on college athletic teams with those who do not, and to disseminate that information to students

and prospective students. The law further states that the student athletes must be compared by gender and ethnic group (Galbato, 1993).

Another significant feature of the context is that community college students can *succeed* without ever receiving a degree or certificate from the institution. According to some experts on assessing institutional effectiveness at two-year institutions, other indicators of success must be used, such as how a college helps its students in the transfer process, obtain employment, upgrade skills required for their present jobs, achieve personal goals, and achieve objectives that are not related to the completion of a degree (Walleri, Seybert, & Cosgrove, 1992).

> "*Student activities are as 'curricular' in nature as the formal classroom or laboratory...and are at times superior in educational value because they are more intermeshed with life than an artificial classroom situation.*"---
>
> Jerry Walke, 1968

The overall goal of BCC's intercollegiate athletic program is to assist its student athletes in developing their athletic, academic, and life skills. Toward that end, the program is committed to building winners on the field and in the classroom. It is not about winning at any cost, violating rules, exploitation of athletes, or sending every team to a national tournament. It *is* about required study-skills retreats, mandatory study halls, an academic early warning system, and academic tutorial assistance as needed.

All entering students participate in new student orientation and receive individualized academic advisement to improve their chances for academic

success during their course of study. Personal counseling, career planning, mentoring, and tutoring services are available to all students as needed, and students are encouraged to participate in student organizations to enhance their personal development and interpersonal skills. In addition, all student athletes receive specialized orientation, one-on-one mentoring by their coaches, mandatory study halls, and intensive three-day retreats, which include seminars and workshops designed to improve their academic performance and problem-solving skills. They also receive tutoring, homework assistance, group academic advisement, and individual referrals to needed services.

A study of a successful retention program at Purdue University found that the delivery of a comprehensive set of student support services resulted in an increase in retention and graduation rates (Dale, 1995). Students in the study indicated that participation in a support network, receiving training in effective study methods, and tutoring services were the most valuable services.

*If you don't know where you are going, any road will take you there---*
*Confucius*

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, as well as the other regional accrediting agencies throughout the nation, require schools to participate in a comprehensive self-regulatory accreditation process. According to the SACS guidelines, "Institutions are required to conduct self-studies at intervals specified by the Commission...and that the self-study assess every aspect of the operation of the institution; involve personnel from all segments of

the institution, including faculty, staff, students, governing board and administration; and provide a comprehensive analysis of the institution, identifying strengths and weaknesses." The process serves to provide the necessary information and identify areas needing improvement prior to the actual visitation, and insures that the institution will measure and improve the quality of education and be able to meet all of the criteria (SACS, 1992).

With regard to the intercollegiate athletic program, the SACS self-study committee recommended that "a system of evaluation, in consonance with the goals and objectives for intercollegiate athletics, be developed and used on a regular basis to ensure that this program is an integral part of the education of athletes and is in keeping with the educational purpose of the institution."

Another purpose of evaluating the Intercollegiate Athletic Program is to determine whether the athletic program is serving student athletes in accordance with stated program goals, and to determine areas that may need improvement. This is in keeping with the college athletic plan for academic excellence which concludes:

> *The intercollegiate athletic program shall be formally evaluated on an annual basis. The results of the evaluation shall be used to further enhance and improve the program* (SACS, 1992).

Some of the factors that are typically examined include: grades, amount of scholarships awarded, course completion, playing ability, cost effectiveness, team performance, plus such personal factors as the attainment of job skills, increase in self-esteem, and character development.

With regard to intercollegiate athletics, the Council of Student Affairs Standards (Accountability Standards, 1994) encourage schools to examine the following factors:

Measure of progress toward major or educational goals
Performance on the field/court
Five-year team-by-team look to assess improvement
Development leading to upper division
Utilization of scholarship dollars
Win/loss records
Data from players
Serendipitous outcomes

The human resources component of the system consists of the college personnel involved with the student athletes. Since they are students first, their classroom instructors play an important role in their educational experience. For athletes, another vitally important role is played by their team coach, the assistant coach, and possibly the trainer as well. In addition to being a *coach* in the true sense of the word, the coach acts as a mentor, tutor, cheerleader, and manager. Very often, the difference between staying in school and succeeding in course work, as opposed to getting discouraged and dropping out, is the personal attention and concern shown by the coach.

## METHODOLOGY

There are ten teams that make up the college's intercollegiate athletic program, six at the Central Campus and four at the North Campus. One team was selected as the unit of analysis for the study. The team selected was the

women's softball team on the College's Central Campus. It is an appropriate purposeful sample since the intent of the research is to examine members of an intercollegiate athletic team in depth. The softball team, which consists of 16 student/athletes, a coach, and an assistant coach represents a homogeneous sample in that all of the players are white females.

To properly evaluate the effectiveness of the intercollegiate athletic program, data collection and analysis should also focus on student reactions to their experience. Surveys, focus groups and other strategies are utilized to gather information on student opinions as to the value of their out-of-class experiences, e.g., academic advisement, retreats, study halls, coaching, practice schedules, career counseling, financial concerns. Focus group interviewing was used along with individual interviews, as student affairs professionals find that focus group interviewing offers a valuable complement to quantitative approaches such as questionnaires, surveys, and evaluation forms (Kaase & Harshbarger, 1993).

Today's college administrators are required to assess their outcomes. In addition to cognitive data such as GPAs, test scores, and degree attainment, affective outcomes are also evaluated such as how a student progresses educationally, how they perceive their educational experience, how they view the various student services they receive, and whether they are getting what they want out of college (Astin, 1991). Data from scientific surveys is useful in determining general trends; one-on-one interviewing can "capture both the

complexity and richness of student experience and their understanding of that experience both inside and outside the classroom" (Tinto, 1995). Interviews are an excellent way to evaluate student satisfaction and attitudes and are a valuable method for gathering sensitive information. Focus groups have proven to be extremely useful in evaluating student development programs as they can be minimally structured and spontaneous as well. The focus group is very popular in addressing various dimensions of student life through a well-planned series of general questions.

***Participants***

All participants were undergraduates at Broward Community College, a large urban community college in the southeastern United States. Six current team members and two former team members were interviewed individually, and eight current team members participated in a focus group interview. The researcher determined the number of subjects to be interviewed by continuing to conduct interviews as long as useful information was being generated (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

***Data Collection and Analysis of Findings***

Ethnographic interviews were conducted with the coach, team members, and former team members with regard to their perceptions of the intercollegiate athletic program in general and the softball team in particular, spending at least one-half hour with each. Follow up interviews and a card sort strategy were

used with some interviewees to provide further clarification. The interviews were conducted during mandatory study halls on Central Campus, in private rooms in the library building. The players were interviewed individually or in a focus group during their regularly scheduled study periods.

Although the principal researcher is not directly involved with the day-to-day operation of the program being studied, the research was conducted as a native since she is responsible for overall student affairs program evaluation at the College and intercollegiate athletics is a department within the division of Student Affairs.

During the initial interviews, a variety of factors were mentioned by the subjects that they attributed to their success academically. The researcher began to observe a pattern emerge and decided to use a single card sort strategy during follow-up interviews with some of the subjects. Ten cards were prepared, each containing a different factor. The cards were laid out on a desk in the same order for each subject as follows:

1) FULL-TIME CREDIT LOAD REQUIREMENT

2) GROUP SUPPORT OF TEAMMATES

3) COACH AS MENTOR

4) MANDATORY STUDY HALLS WITH TUTOR

5) CLASS ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENT

6) TAKING CLASSES WITH TEAMMATES

7) ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIP

8) MONITORED PROGRESS REPORTS

9) DESIRE TO NOT "LET THE TEAM DOWN"

10) MINIMUM GPA REQUIREMENT

Each subject was instructed to read all of the cards carefully and then to rearrange them in order of which factor, in their own opinion, was most important in terms of their own academic success, and to continue in order until the least important factor was last in their stack.

A total of ten subjects participated in the card sort. The results did not confirm the researcher's expectations. No clear pattern emerged. Factors that were *least* important for some subjects were *most* important for other subjects. Table 1 contains an analysis of the responses.

Table 1. Selected Academic Success Factors

| Factors | # of subjects who chose each factor* |
|---|---|
| ATHLETIC SCHOLARSHIP | 7 |
| MANDATORY STUDY HALLS WITH TUTOR | 5 |
| CLASS ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENT | 4 |
| COACH AS MENTOR | 3 |
| FULL TIME CREDIT LOAD REQUIREMENT | 3 |
| GROUP SUPPORT OF TEAMMATES | 2 |
| DESIRE TO NOT "LET THE TEAM DOWN | 2 |
| MINIMUM GPA REQUIREMENT | 2 |
| TAKING CLASSES WITH TEAMMATES | 1 |
| MONITORED PROGRESS REPORTS | 1 |

* First three choices of each subject were compiled.

Discussion with the subjects during the card sort revealed that there was some difficulty in differentiating between the factors. One subject said that in her opinion, receiving an athletic scholarship *includes* the minimum GPA requirement, minimum credit load, and mandatory study halls, since all of these were *required* in order to maintain her eligibility. Another said she wouldn't be at BCC at all were it not for the scholarship therefore, receipt of an athletic scholarship would have to be #1.

## DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study of the Central Campus women's softball team was to examine the impact of participation in intercollegiate sports on academic success based on interviews with the coach, current players, and former players, in groups and individually. Respondents were asked a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit in-depth answers. It is the belief of the researcher that the respondents provided honest and candid information as to their observations and opinions of the softball program. Several of the players have participated in the sport since they were small children, some played on the team under the previous coach, some had played on high school teams, some on other college teams, and some had played for the coach elsewhere before coming to Broward Community College. The researcher was impressed with the level of commitment and enthusiasm of the players toward the sport, their teammates and the athletic program.

Since student athletes are required to maintain satisfactory grades in spite of a 4-hour per day practice schedule, they can be easily likened to other at-risk populations, especially minority students. Since it appears that the softball players view the interventions as necessary to their academic success, the BCC academic game plan (Young, 1990) may be able to serve as a model for at-risk and minority student populations.

***General Impressions***

The current players attributed their continuation in college to their membership on the team, specifically naming the following factors: minimum GPA requirement, full-time attendance requirement, group support of their teammates, the coach, the monitoring of progress reports, mandatory study halls, and the tutor. Several stated that they "wouldn't be in school," or "wouldn't have stuck it out" if they were not on the team. A former player said "the team would have been the only reason for staying" but she had to leave for "financial reasons."

The coach was credited with giving needed guidance and support, staying on top of their academic responsibilities, requiring study time on trips, and helping the players "choose better teachers." The fact that they took classes with fellow teammates was repeatedly identified as a major factor in their sticking with their course work. One respondent said the team is what "gets me through school. There is always someone to turn to. It's a *lean on me* team."

Although the results of the card sort and the interviews did not reveal one overriding factor that influenced the academic success of the subjects, the study did confirm retention literature that the stronger the relationship between the student and the institution, the greater the likelihood of course completion (Astin, 1991; Tinto, 1993).

In answer to the question, "What do you consider the *best* aspect of your experience on the team?" most respondents pointed to the friendships and the camaraderie, with some adding that they were particularly happy with the student life activities and their weekly evening out as a team.

The following "magic wand" question was posed in the middle of each interview. "If you had the power to change anything you wanted about the program, what would you make different?" Most were satisfied with all aspects of the team, however several suggestions for improvement included "more live hitting than flip drills," "have a field on campus," and "no weekend practices."

***Summary***

The critical factor in any evaluation of a student services program is unquestionably student satisfaction. Based on the subjects interviewed, the researcher concludes that the student athletes on the women's softball team are well satisfied with the College, the athletic program, the coach, the level of financial support, and their playing conditions.

The results of this study confirm others (Dale, 1995) that attributed a support network, study skills training, and tutoring as the most important factors related to student academic success. In addition, this study suggested that future research be conducted on the value of block scheduling in retention and student success. Additional research could also include compiling data on the number of athletes to be accepted into upper-division universities and the number of transfer athletes to receive tuition scholarships at their upper-division universities.

As the students in this study were a homogeneous group of white females at a community college that emphasizes the academic success of their athletes, the results cannot be generalized to students of other ethnic groups, male athletes, or students attending other types of institutions, i.e., four year or residential universities. More study is needed in a variety of settings to determine the influence of participation in intercollegiate athletics on other types of students or the influence of other internal communities.

*Judith S. Berson is associate vice president for student affairs at Broward Community College, Fort Lauderdale, Florida. She is a former president of the Florida Association of Student Financial Aid Administrators, past chair of the accountability standards committee of the Florida Community College Council of Student Affairs, and has written two books and numerous articles on educational issues. This research study was conducted as part of her course work for a Doctoral Program in Adult Education/Human Resource Development at Florida International University/Broward. Contact: Judith S. Berson, 225 East Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, FL 33301, email jsberson@aol.com*

## REFERENCES


*Accountability Standards for Student Development in Florida's Community Colleges.* (1994). Florida Community College Council of Student Affairs.

Astin, A.W. (1991). *Assessment for Excellence: The Philosophy and Practice of Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education.* New York: American Council on Education and MacMillan Publishing Co.

*Athletic Sub-Committee Report.* (1995). Fort Lauderdale, FL: Broward Community College Student Activities Board.

Beatty-Guenter, P. (1994). "Sorting, Supporting, Connecting, and Transforming: Retention Strategies at Community Colleges." *Community College Journal of Research and Practice.*

Blum, D.E. (1993). "Graduation Rate of Scholarship Athletes Rose After Proposition 48 Was Adopted, NCAA Reports." The *Chronicle of Higher Education.* July 7.

Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs. Consortium of Student Affairs Professional Organizations. (1986). *CAS Standards and Guidelines for Student Services/Development Programs.*

Dale, P.M. (1995). *A Successful College Retention Program.* Purdue University.

Galbato, L. (1993). *Student Right to Know Report for 1993-94.* (Report Abstract No. RR93-06). Fort Lauderdale, FL: Broward Community College.

Gavigan, E. and Sutton, J. (1993). *Achieving Equity in Women's Athletics at Broward Community College.* Fort Lauderdale, FL: Broward Community College.

Johnson, S.K. and Whitfield, E.A. (1991). *Evaluating Guidance Programs: A Practitioner's Guide.* The American College Testing Program and the National Consortium of State Career Guidance Supervisors.

Kaase, K. J. and Harshbarger, D.B. (1993). "Applying Focus Groups in Student Affairs Assessment." *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Journal Vol. 30, No. 4.* Summer.

Lancaster, L. (1992). "SAT and GPA Predicting the Academic Performance of Prospective Community College Athletes." Fort Lauderdale, FL: Broward Community College.

Naretto, J.A. (1993). "Adult Student Retention: The Influence of Internal and External Communities." *National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) Journal Vol. 30, No. 4.* Summer.

Patton, Michael Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods*. Newbury Park, CA: SAGE Publications.

Sloan, D. and Raymond, A. (1987). *A Strategic Plan for Broward Community College Student Development into the 1990s*. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Broward Community College.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (1992-93). *Criteria for Accreditation Commission on Colleges*.

Strauss, A., and Corbin, J. (1990). *Basics of Qualitative Research: Theory, Procedures, and Techniques*. Newbury, CA: Sage Publications.

Tinto, V. (1995). "Discovering the Sources of Student Success" *From Vision to Reality: Student Affairs Agenda for the '90s*. Iowa City, Iowa: ACT.

Walleri, D., Seybert, J., and Cosgrove, J. (1992). "What do Students Want? How Student Intentions Affect Institutional Assessment." *American Association of Community and Junior Colleges Journal*. Feb./Mar.

Walke, Jerry L. (1968). "On Student Activities in the Small College," *School Activities*, April, p. 2. cited by Martinez, Y, Heartman, K, and Ludwig, C. (1992) in *Needs and Wants in Student Programming for Alverna College*, May.

Winniford, J., Kibler, B. and DiBrito, B. (1993). "Demonstrating Institutional Accountability Through Outcomes Assessment: Implementing Student Development." Presented at the National Conference of the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, Boston.

Wright, T. and Galbato, L. (1992). *Academic Performance of Student-Athletes at BCC: An Initial Cohort Study* (Report Abstract No. RR92-14). Fort Lauderdale, FL: Broward Community College, Office of Institutional Research.

Yelen, S. and Duley, J. (1990). "Efficient Evaluation of Individual Performance in Field Placement." *Guides for the Improvement of Instruction in Higher Education No. 14*.

Young, G.W. (1990). *A Plan for Excellence in Intercollegiate Athletics at Broward Community College*. Fort Lauderdale, FL: Broward Community College.

Appendix

*The following is the general structuring and wording of the questions used in conducting the student interviews of the current and former softball team members. The actual interviews were taped with permission, and were subsequently transcribed.*

## STUDENT INTERVIEW GUIDE

Subject: _____ Date _____ Home Tel. _____

Interview Setting _____ Work Tel. _____

Introduction of the study including the statement: "**I am here to collect data on your perceptions of the intercollegiate athletic program at BCC.**"

1. Describe what difference being on the softball team has made in your life.

2. Describe how specific aspects of the sports program have affected your progress in school.

3. In reflecting on your experience being on the team, what would you consider the best aspect?

4. How would you describe the strengths of the coach?

5. What about the coach's weaknesses?

6. If you had the power to change anything about the athletic program, what would you make different?

7. If you had a very good friend who was younger, (still in high school), and she expressed an interest in coming to BCC and playing on the team, what advice would you give her?

8. You and your teammates have mentioned several factors that play a part in your academic success. I'm handing you a deck of 11 cards in no particular order, each with a different factor. Please review them all and then rearrange them so the most important is first and so on.

9. I've asked you a lot of questions, but there may be some aspect I missed that would help me to better understand the impact of team sports on academic success. Is there anything you would like to add that we didn't cover?

Thank you for your time. I appreciate your help.